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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALEXANDRIA 000751

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SUBJECT: ALEXANDRIA: TRIAL OF SUSPECTED JIHAD MEMBERS

REF: (A) ALEXANDRIA 541 (B) ALEXANDRIA 341  
- (C) ALEXANDRIA 43 (D) ALEXANDRIA 38

11. (C) SUMMARY: THE TRIAL OF THIRTY-ONE SUSPECTED ISLAMIC JIHAD MEMBERS, SOME OF WHOM WERE ARRESTED IN ALEXANDRIA IN AUGUST, WILL BEGIN OCTOBER 29 AT ALEXANDRIAS HIGH MILITARY COURT ACCORDING TO WIDESPREAD PRESS COVERAGE. THE SUSPECTED MILITANTS, WHO COULD FACE THE DEATH PENALTY IF FOUND GUILTY OF THE CHARGES OF SUBVERSION AND PLOTTING ASSASSINATIONS, WILL BE THE FIRST LARGE GROUP TO STAND TRIAL UNDER EGYPTS NEW ANTI-TERRORISM LAWS. LOCAL SECURITY SOURCES DESCRIBED THE BOMBINGS OF ALCOHOL SHOPS IN ALEXANDRIA LAST WINTER AS "KIDS STUFF" COMPARED TO WHAT WAS BEING PLANNED BY THE SUSPECTED JIHAD MEMBERS. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) THE TRIAL OF THIRTY-ONE SUSPECTED ISLAMIC JIHAD MEMBERS WILL BEGIN OCTOBER 29 AT ALEXANDRIAS HIGH MILITARY COURT ACCORDING TO FRONT PAGE COVERAGE IN ALL OFFICIAL PAPERS AND TELEVISION NEWS BROADCASTS. THE SUSPECTED MILITANTS, WHO COULD FACE THE DEATH PENALTY IF FOUND GUILTY OF THE CHARGES OF SUBVERSION AND PLOTTING ASSASSINATIONS, WILL BE THE FIRST LARGE GROUP TO STAND TRIAL UNDER EGYPTS NEW ANTI-TERRORISM LAW PASSED IN JULY. GENERAL ABDEL GAFFAR HELAL, DIRECTOR OF THE MILITARY COURT SYSTEM, ANNOUNCED THAT THE SUSPECTS, SOME OF WHOM HAD BEEN ARRESTED IN ALEXANDRIA IN AUGUST, WERE FROM TWO JIHAD SPLINTER GROUPS WHICH HAD BEEN PLANNING ACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS FIGURES, IMPORTANT GOE INSTALLATIONS AND TOURIST SITES IN EGYPT. SOME OF THE MEMBERS REPORTEDLY HAD RECEIVED MILITARY TRAINING IN OTHER COUNTRIES (I.E. AFGHANISTAN). THOSE ARRESTED INCLUDED A FEW FOREIGNERS (JORDANIAN, SUDANESE) AND EGYPTIANS FROM FAYOUM, MINYA, ALEXANDRIA, MANSOURA, CAIRO, SOHAG, KAFR EL SHEIKH, AND LUXOR.

13. (U) ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE FIRST JIHAD SPLINTER GROUP TRAINED MEMBERS OUTSIDE OF EGYPT AND SENT THEM BACK TO EGYPT (VIA LIBYA AND SUDAN) WITH MONEY AND WEAPONS TO COMMIT ACTS OF SABOTAGE. FIFTEEN MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP WERE ARRESTED AND NINE OTHERS FLED. POLICE FOUND ARMS, EXPLOSIVES, FRAUDULENT IDENTIFICATION CARDS AND PASSPORTS, AND MONEY AT THE TIME OF THE ARREST. THE SECOND GROUP, "GAMAAT EL-TAKFEER," HAS ORGANIZED TO DISCREDIT EGYPTS RULING REGIME AND PEOPLE AS "NON-BELIEVERS." THIS GROUP REPORTEDLY HAS PLANNING TO ASSASSINATE GOE OFFICIALS (INCLUDING POLICE) AND DESTROY INSTALLATIONS (INCLUDING SOME MOSQUES) AS INDICATED ON PLANS AND A MAP FOUND AT THE TIME OF THE ARREST OF SIXTEEN OF THE GROUPS TWENTY-TWO MEMBERS.

14. (U) GOE OFFICIALS ON THE HIT LIST REPORTEDLY INCLUDED: DR. SAFWAT EL-SHERIF, MINISTER OF INFORMATION; MINISTER OF INTERIOR ABDEL HALIM MOUSSA; GENERAL MUSTAFA KAMEL, GOVERNOR OF DAKAHLIA AND FORMER HEAD OF STATE SECURITY; MOHAMED HASSAN TANTAWI, GOVERNOR OF SOHAG; AND OTHER FORMER MINISTERS OF INTERIOR.

15. (U) GENERAL ABDUL GAFFAR HELAL ALSO SAID THAT THE TRIAL WILL TAKE PLACE IN ALEXANDRIA BECAUSE THAT IS WHERE MOST OF THE GROUPS ACTIVITIES WERE CENTERED.

STATE SECURITY REPORTEDLY HAD TRACKED SOME OF THE MEMBERS MOVEMENT TO ALEXANDRIA FROM UPPER EGYPT FOLLOWING DISTURBANCES THERE LAST SPRING. THE INVESTIGATION ALSO REPORTEDLY REVEALED THAT THE MEMBERS USED TO HOLD MEETINGS AT THE IBRAHIM MOSQUE OF SHEIKH AHMED EL-MEHALAWY AT RAMLEH STATION (DOWNTOWN ALEXANDRIA) AND THAT THEY BELONG TO AN INTERNATIONAL FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT LED BY OMAR ABDURRAHMAN, RASHED GHANOUSHI OF TUNISIA, ABBAS MIDANI OF ALGERIA, AND HASSAN EL-TURABI OF SUDAN.

¶16. (C) LOCAL SECURITY CONTACTS CONFIRMED THE PRESS ACCOUNTS AND ADDED MORE DETAILS. THOSE ARRESTED IN ALEXANDRIA IN AUGUST (REF A) APPARENTLY CAME HERE FLEEING FROM THE SECURITY CRACKDOWN IN UPPER EGYPT LAST SPRING. THEY MAY ALSO HAVE TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THEIR NEW LOCATION TO ASSIST THE LOCAL JIHAD ORGANIZATION IN CARRYING OUT SOME OF THE ALEXANDRIA INCIDENTS REPORTED PREVIOUSLY. ACCORDING TO OUR SECURITY CONTACTS, THE TWO JIHAD SPLINTER GROUPS PLANS WERE HIGHLY COMPARTMENTALIZED AND THE MEMBERS GENERALLY DID NOT KNOW EACH OTHER, BOTH FOR THEIR PROTECTION AND THE SUCCESS OF THEIR OPERATIONS. ADDITIONALLY, SOME OF THOSE ARRESTED ARE REPORTEDLY IDEOLOGICALLY-MOTIVATED, WELL-EDUCATED PROFESSIONALS, NOT JUST UNSKILLED LABORERS ATTRACTED TO FUNDAMENTALISM FOR ECONOMIC REASONS, AS CONVEYED BY PRESS COVERAGE.

¶17. (C) SECURITY CONTACTS INDICATED THAT THE BOMBINGS OF ALCOHOL SHOPS IN ALEXANDRIA LAST WINTER (REFS B-D) WERE "KIDS STUFF" COMPARED TO WHAT WAS BEING PLANNED. STATE SECURITY OFFICIALS TOLD US THAT JIHAD MEMBERS WHO THE PRESS REPORTED HAD "ESCAPED" SIMPLY HAD NOT BEEN ARRESTED YET; THEY ARE BELIEVED TO BE OUTSIDE OF EGYPT AT THIS TIME.

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¶18. (C) OTHER SECURITY SOURCES RECENTLY PROVIDED ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE INDICATING THE RISING LEVEL OF POLICE CONCERN IN ALEXANDRIA AND NEIGHBORING GOVERNORATES. SEVERAL GOE OFFICIALS REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN PLACED UNDER HEAVY PERSONAL SECURITY DUE TO THE UNCOVERING OF SPECIFIC PLOTS AGAINST THEM, INCLUDING THE GOVERNOR OF DAKAHLIA, GENERAL MUSTAFA KAMEL, THE GOVERNOR OF GHARBIA, MAHER EL GUENDY, AND ALEXANDRIA STATE SECURITY'S HEAD OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS. KAMEL, FORMER HEAD OF STATE SECURITY, AND EL GUENDY, WHO INTERROGATED FUNDAMENTALISTS DURING SADAT'S TIME, HAVE REPUTATIONS OF HAVING BEEN VERY TOUGH ON EXTREMISTS.

¶19. (C) COMMENT: THIS TRIAL OF SUSPECTED JIHAD MEMBERS IS SIGNIFICANT, BOTH BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF THE FIRST TO TAKE PLACE IN A MILITARY COURT UNDER THE ANTI-TERRORISM LAWS PASSED THIS SUMMER AND BECAUSE OF THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE OFFENSES. OUR STATE SECURITY CONTACTS, WHO IN THE PAST HAVE RESPONDED TO OUR INQUIRIES ABOUT FUNDAMENTALIST ACTIVITIES IN A LOW KEY AND RELAXED MANNER, READILY CONFIRMED PRESS REPORTS AND VOLUNTEERED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON THIS CASE. THE NEWLY REVEALED DETAILS ABOUT THE SUSPECTS ARRESTED IN ALEXANDRIA IN AUGUST CERTAINLY PUT INTO A MORE SERIOUS LIGHT THE LOCAL INCIDENTS REPORTED REFTELS. AS TO WHY THE GOE HAS DECIDED TO START THE TRIAL NOW, AS SUGGESTED BY THE EXTENSIVE PRESS COVERAGE, THE GOE SEEMS TO BE ANXIOUS TO COUNTER THE NEGATIVE PUBLICITY AND EFFECTS OF THE RECENT ATTACKS ON TOURISTS AND TO DETER EXTREMISTS FROM COMMITTING FURTHER VIOLENCE. END COMMENT.

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